

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

OCTOBER 2017

NEWS

Since the last meeting of the Steering Group five new members have joined the team: Michael Norbury is our Natural Flood Management Manager; Steph Hepworth, Jayne Foat (seconded part time from Sefton MBC) and Phil Harris are all working on the Defra funded 'Trees for Learning' programme. Steven Ward is our Research Assistant for the Natural Health Service programme and at the start of the month Yendle Barwise joined us, helping to develop our Wood Allotment project. Each of our new team members is funded through external projects.

At a national level, the Team is coordinating input from England's Community Forests into a Business Case for innovative funding for Community Forests – more information on this to follow.

We are also in discussion with DEFRA about the Manifesto pledge to plant one million urban trees by 2022, and other potential projects from DEFRA.

Community Forest Trust (CFT) is developing its role as the voice of the Community Forest sector. CFT is highlighted in our Mersey Forest Partnership Agreement as a key partner. Half of the Mersey Forest Team is employed through CFT and CFT is the accountable body for many projects. We are keen to support and develop the role of CFT as a sector champion.

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: amongst other support, the team has helped the group to develop its social media.
- **Friends of Owley Wood**, the footpath works funded through Woodland Trust and Saltscapes funds in partnership with Cheshire Wildlife Trust are now complete. These were used for the launch of the Weaverham Petal Walks in September.
- **Friends of Mill and Alder Woods** are continuing their community outreach through a series of site based tasks including planting within the woodland area – this will involve St Christophers Primary School.
- **Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill** have been undertaking a series of practical woodland management task days.

- **Church Wood Conservation Group** have their work programme planned for autumn with their new chainsaw user, logging several fallen branches.
- **Friends of Colliers Moss** is now up and running with an activity programme planned for the next nine months.

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'. The Mersey Forest Team provides the secretariat support for both groups. In Cheshire, participants at the recent joint meeting between the LNP and the Total Environment Project agreed to discuss with the LEP how to work together within the LEP's emerging Place Strategy.

FRODSHAM STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

The team are being supported through a Member's budget to develop a business plan for the delivery of a programme of activity in and around Frodsham. This will be focussed on environmental improvements and health and wellbeing gains for local communities. Following a series of meetings with interested organisations, two community drop-in sessions have also been held and the report is being written up.

WILDLIFE

COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

The Cory-funded Phase 2 works, to open up and improve footpaths, restore drainage ditches and repair / reclaim the amphitheatre area, are now complete. Two wildlife walks have been well attended and a clean-up day was held in July to prepare the Family Forest School site and give people an opportunity to learn more about Colliers Moss. The last of the WREN funding will be spent over the next few weeks to further upgrade some of the access routes and provide better signage. A local secondary school has been engaged in activities throughout the summer and early autumn. Volunteer sessions have been used to help tidy up footpath corridors.

Warrington Running Club has opted to use the site for all three of its series of trail races, and Junior Parkrun is now up and running each Sunday morning, attracting 20+ volunteers and 45+ junior runners.

WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Group has become established and held two events. There is an enthusiastic committee which has met a number of times to plan the activities for when the felling season starts again in November. The members are coming together on 14 October.

As a result of The Woodland Trust funding more wood allotments are able to be developed across the Mersey Forest, and then more widely through the Woodland Trust network. There is a Community Woodlands conference featuring Wood Allotments at Risley Moss on Saturday 11 November, followed by a visit to Spud Wood during the afternoon to see an established group.

<http://www.woodallotments.com/>

LANDOWNER SUPPORT

Landowners in the Sankey Valley, Sefton and Cheshire are being supported to come together to submit an application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF). For each area there needs to be a total combined landholding of 2,000 hectares. If successful, there will be support for landowners to improve their land - including developing natural solutions to flooding through applications for Countryside Stewardship and other grants; access to training to help implement environmental proposals and opportunities to join with other landowners and carry out work co-operatively. The next stage for both catchments is to hold engagements for farmers and land managers, to inform them about the CSFF, landscape issues, their aspirations and training needs as part of the bid.

BIOMASS

The Mersey Forest is continuing to work alongside the Stobart Group, as part of the successful £5.1M Regional Growth Fund bid, to identify under-managed woodland and assess their potential for biomass supply to the new CHP plant in Widnes. Over 50 local authorities across the country have met with Stobart Forestry to discuss opportunities for woodfuel supply.

WATER MANAGEMENT

URBAN CATCHMENT FORESTRY (NATURAL COURSE)

The Team are working on a three year LIFE+ project with colleagues at Community Forest Trust. The project focuses on the use of Urban Catchment Forestry to deliver multiple ecosystem services in urban areas. The first part of the project involves developing opportunity mapping, which is now complete, with a delivery pilot to be developed in St.Helens. The team are also using Section 106 money to offset the visual impacts from the Kirby to Orrell overhead powerline; this includes 2.2 ha of tree planting and 'slow the flow' measures to hold 10,000 m³ of water in the landscape – with a cost benefit ratio of 1:5.

SLOW THE FLOW

During September seven natural flood management leaky dams were made to hold up water in the landscape above Blackbrook, St.Helens which has regularly flooded. The work was thanks to the help of over a hundred officers from the Environment Agency as part of three 'environmental leave' days.

Mike Norbury is also supporting the Slow the Flow initiative on the River Dane, with benefits to communities at risk including Congleton and Northwich. As part of the Environment Agency supported work, Mike is also supporting capital projects in Lostock, Smithhills, Rochdale, Littleborough and New Mills.

RECREATION AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

NEW DISCOVER THE MERSEY FOREST

The project aiming to build a new version of Discover The Mersey Forest and incorporate it into the main Mersey Forest website is almost complete. Part of the project is to make the main website responsive so that it works better on mobile phones and tablets.

<http://www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk/?region=2&page=Home>

The team have also been working with Merseyside Sports Partnership to incorporate geocaching (an outdoor activity in which cachers use a GPS receiver to find a 'treasure' hidden by other participants) into the new section of the website. This was launched in the summer with twenty caches have already been hidden around Merseyside.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

NATURE4HEALTH

The final year collaboration of Nature4Health is underway with over 1,150 participants already having been involved in the programme. The Big Lottery visited the project in June to review progress and gave it a clean bill of health with the suggestion of continuation funding. The team has attended several conferences to share learning; interest in the model and its compelling outcomes continues to grow.

CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

The team are working with partners, including Active Cheshire and the authority's two Health Rangers, to deliver a programme of activities aligned with the N4H model; the aim being to help reduce health inequalities across the borough.

A presentation to the the Cheshire West and Chester Health and Wellbeing Board will be made in November 2017. www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk

BIG POTENTIAL – NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE NEXT STEPS

This project is helping to develop the Natural Health Service for it to be in a place which is ready to be commissioned to deliver a suite of five products to be offered to people who are identified by their GP as having the potential to benefit from activity programmes in the green

environment. The activities include health walking, mindful contact with nature, Forest Schools, horticulture therapy and practical conservation (Green Gym).

This project will run until October 2017 and has been funded by The Big Potential, part of the Big Lottery. The work has included a market analysis and engagement with commissioners, supply chain management, developing a new website and the conference in Liverpool. The work has also been picked up nationally by the NHS Commissioning and Social Prescribing team and DEFRA as part of their 25 year Plan.

PLAY AND EDUCATION

TREES FOR LEARNING

The £1.3m of funding will support projects across the national community forests until 2020. The Mersey Forest has secured £350k of this funding, and will project manage the programme. Plans for this next planting season are now underway and the team have visited over 30 projects ready for planting in the next few weeks, with an estimated total of 12,000 trees.

FOREST SCHOOL

In July the Forest Team supported Sefton Play Council to run a week-long Forest School leaders' training in Liverpool for LJMU education lecturers to enable them to train their own student teachers, a further course is planned for February. Forest School sessions have started at Chris the King Primary and mentoring support for a trainee Forest School Leader. Many of the Defra Trees For Learning sites, incorporate new forest school areas as part of the planting.

Smurfit Kappa Foundation are keen to support the third year of Forest School work across Merseyside –this will include developing sites for children in SEN settings of all types.

GREEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This European funded project with environmental partners and schools for children with special needs across the UK, Belgium and Slovenia is progressing well. The aim of this project is to utilise welcoming, eco-friendly outdoor settings for children with learning disabilities and, through an exchange of practices, develop innovative methods for outdoor learning. Staff at Green Lane School, Warrington, have received support in preparing their Forest School site and this is now being used for regular outdoor lessons, sessions and support is also planned for Bluebell Park School. There is a conference planned with partners early November based at Risley Moss, Bluebell School in Knowsley and Green Lane School in Warrington.

NATURAL PLAY

In Warrington, community consultation is now complete at Parsonage Park, Great Sankey following discussion with over 150 residents in June; and Glazebury Play Area now has newly

installed willow water voles, sand play, carved wooden seats and a community veg growing area. Work will start at Wenlock Gardens, Ellesmere Port on the next phase of improvements. Cheyney Road Park, is almost complete with a chunky picnic bench, and carved wooden archway into the tree planting area being installed, a community bulb planting event will be organised in half term.

CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

SALTSCAPE

This three-year Heritage Lottery Funded project to conserve and restore important features connected to the salt landscape in Cheshire is drawing to a close. The Mersey Forest is managing a project to support owners of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands. Practical woodland management has taken place at Hob Hey Wood owned by Frodsham Town Council, alongside producing a management plan for Owley Wood and Poors Wood Northwich.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

URBAN GREENUP

This €10 million Horizon 2020 European funded project officially started on 1 June. The Mersey Forest is working with colleagues at Liverpool City Council and the University of Liverpool to deliver a £3.4 million programme of interventions in the city. This includes the opportunities identified in the Liverpool Business Improvement District (BID) green infrastructure audit.

Over the next five years partners will undertake a range of research projects and work with local communities, organisations and other stakeholders to identify and retrofit a number of 'green corridors'. The aim is to tackle environmental city issues through 'Nature Based Solutions' and deliver a range of environmental improvements including increasing biodiversity, improving air quality and alleviating surface water issues. Work will also include planting trees, introducing green walls and establishing rain gardens and sustainable urban drainage systems, whilst enhancing pedestrian and cyclist routes in and out of the city.