

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

JANUARY 2019

NEWS

2019 marks the 25th birthday for The Mersey Forest and a programme of activity and events to mark the occasion later in the year.

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 are undertaking a dragonfly pond creation project with funding support from TMF. The group continues to run a large number of events across the woodlands.
- Friends of Owley Wood – Are continuing with access works now they have a supply of timber with CWT.
- Friends of Mill and Alder Woods have been working with Lancashire Wildlife Trust to clean up an area of Alder wood – so it can be used for future Forest School sessions with St Ambrose School, staff at the school are training as Forest School Leaders.
- Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill have been undertaking a series of practical woodland management task days.
- Church Wood Conservation Group have completed the work under the Woodland Trust Communities grant and have now installed a new noticeboard.
- Friends of Colliers Moss meetings have been well attended and are attracting a number of keen members. More resources will be needed to support them.
- Hob Hey Wood Friends have carried out conservation days learning new skills and have set up a Facebook page and website. They are raising funds for tools, insurance and a shed to store materials.

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.

Nature Connected has launched 2019 as a Year of Green Action where people from all backgrounds will have the opportunity to be involved in projects that improve the natural world.

A [Liverpool City Region Year of Environment 2019 website](#) has been created to act as a hub for activities/events and communication throughout the year.

WILDLIFE

COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

Approval has been gained for Phase 2 of the project to cap and safeguard the excavated concrete pipeline across the southern boundary of the site. This will involve the importing of more material to cover the line of the pipe and will ultimately create a new access route.

Importing material for the Phase 1 pipeline work is now completed and the area will now see tree planting and wildflower seeding to restore the bare ground, before a surfaced route is installed, with access controls.

The first of Warrington Running Club's 2019 series of 5-mile trail races will be held on 26th January, followed by spring, summer and autumn races on the site.

WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Association is up and running again with a new cutting session. Landowner agreements have been agreed with the Woodland Trust and training has been undertaken over recent months in Weaverham, Cheshire, for a new group which is now flourishing.

New Wood Allotment groups are in development with a number of other interested landowners across the Forest, including local authorities and a private landowner. These include groups at Hob Hey Wood, Frodsham, Fir Tree Farm, St. Helens, and two small packages of sites owned respectively by the Woodland Trust.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT

The team is working with Reaseheath College to support a group of farmers along the Lower Dane corridor near Northwich as part of the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. The project is enabling landowners to work together to improve their land - including developing natural solutions to flooding; access to training to help implement environmental proposals and opportunities to join with other landowners and carry out work co-operatively.

BIOMASS AND WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

As a result of the tendering process for management of undermanaged woodland in Cheshire West and Chester Stobart Forestry has been awarded the contract. The aim is to produce a steady income from the sustainable management of woodlands that, to date, have had little

silvicultural input. The uplift in timber prices and increasing demand for biomass now means that we have buoyant local market that can support early management.

WATER MANAGEMENT

URBAN CATCHMENT FORESTRY AND SLOW THE FLOW

The team are also supporting the business cases for Environment Agency flood risk capital projects.

ST.HELENS POWERLINE 106 MITIGATION PROJECT

The Team is delivering a programme of environmental improvements in the mitigation zone of the Kirkby-Orrell overhead line, including work with schools to plant trees and wildflowers, implementation of natural flood measures, planting of trees and hedgerows on private land and along road corridors, and the control of invasive species. Tree planting with parents and children was undertaken at Bleak Hill School before Christmas, and this has continued in January with pupils at Rivington Primary School and Rainford Brook Lodge School. The team is working with Corpus Christi Primary School to create new access in the school woodland for future Forest School sessions. A new path is being installed in Bleak Hill Primary School woodland following thinning works.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

The team is working really well with a range of partners across Cheshire West to deliver the programme of activities funded by the authority. Over 1000 participants have been involved so far with some inspiring case studies coming through, highlighting the real benefits people are experiencing.

This exciting rolling programme of activities in Cheshire West continues to develop. www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk/Cheshire

PLAY AND EDUCATION

TREES FOR LEARNING

Mersey Forest secured £350k of funding to support tree planting projects with primary schools, and is project managing the national programme for our community forest partners. The project has seen large scale planting in schools and greenspaces engaging primary school children through tree planting and follow-up activities linked to the national curriculum.

The 2017/18 season saw over 27,500 trees planted within The Mersey Forest. Across England the Community Forests planted over 66,000 trees with 11,000 children; some 8% ahead of target.

The Trees for Learning programme is now in the third year of delivery and the team is on target to plant over 21,000 trees and engaging with 100 schools within The Mersey Forest. So far, over 40 schools have been engaged since mid-November, with over 800 trees planted. Last week a representative from Defra visited Evelyn Primary School in Prescott to observe a planting session with the children, and discuss how we design and implement planting schemes.

GREEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This European funded project with environmental partners and schools for children with additional needs across the UK, Belgium and Slovenia is progressing well. An international conference was being held at Bluebell Park School, Kirkby last October to share learning and explore opportunities to create a network of practitioners and schools. Over 90 people attended the event and the education activities pack (toolbox) was well received which will be available to schools within the next couple of months.

NATURAL PLAY

A community planting day was held at Wenlock Gardens, Ellesmere Port, with over 150 trees planted. The footpath work has now been completed on site, with mounds, tunnel, slide and climbing logs to be installed in March.

Cheyney Road Park in Chester is complete, and now has an established 'friends group' who are regularly helping to look after the area, weaving the willow dome and fences, feeding birds on site. A well-attended task day was held in November and the wildflower meadow has been cut ready for spring preparation.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

URBAN GREENUP

This five-year €10 million Horizon 2020 European funded project started in June 2017. 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.

A number of interventions to deliver 'Nature Based Solutions' have been identified across the city, including green walls and sustainable urban drainage systems, design specifications are being finalised and the year-long baseline environmental monitoring has commenced. The project has also resulted in a number of improvements to GI-Val, The Mersey Forest's Green Infrastructure Valuation Toolkit.

CHESHIRE EAST GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The initial assessment phase is now complete, and officers at Cheshire East Council are looking at extending the commission to work it up into a full green infrastructure strategy.

ST HELENS PARKS AND GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

As a continuation of previous work for St Helens Council, the team have been commissioned to produce a high-level vision and outline strategic framework for the borough's parks and green spaces. Two public consultation events were held at the town hall in December and the outcomes of those will be incorporated into the framework.