

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

OCTOBER 2018

NEWS

The team is developing a number of projects which, we hope, will go forward as the first tranche of projects funded via DEFRA as part of the Northern Forest. Some are speculative and others may take a year or two to get through the regulatory processes, but the current programme totals over 120ha of new woodland. This is before we have started any formal promotion of the programme.

The Natural Health Service in Cheshire West and Chester was shortlisted for the UK APSE awards.

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 – Over the last few months, the group has achieved over 360 volunteer hours. They have installed steps with resting points; re-graded footpaths down the steep valley side and relocated bluebells to avoid being trampled.
- Friends of Mill and Alder Woods have been working with Lancashire Wildlife Trust to underplant part of the woodland with feathered trees to encourage a better woodland structure.
- Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill have been undertaking a series of practical woodland management task days.
- Church Wood Conservation Group have been tree pruning along access routes and are considering undertaking footpath repairs and a putting in 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 is promoting 2019 as a Year of Green Action. This will link well with Mersey Forest plans to mark 25 years since the Forest Plan was approved by Government.

WILDLIFE

COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

A project to cap and safeguard the excavated concrete pipeline across part of the site is nearing completion. This has involved the importing of material to cover the line of the pipe and in doing so will create an improved access route through the site.

A programme of wildlife walks is again being offered to visitors, and in April the site hosted a visit of students from the National School of Forestry to learn how forestry can benefit communities.

Warrington Running Club has opted to use the site again for its series of 5-mile trail races in 2018. Junior Parkrun is held each Sunday morning and attracting 20+ volunteers and 45+ junior runners.

WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Association finished its first year with a successful record of cutting days and a strong committee. There was an open day for new members in September and interest from residents remains high. Training sessions are being developed in preparation for the next cutting season which begins in November.

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 and by Cheshire West and Chester. Agreements and training will be undertaken over the coming months, with a view to have each new Wood Allotment group set up in time for the 2018/19 cutting season.

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

The tendering process for management of undermanaged woodland in Cheshire West and Chester is now reaching a conclusion. The tender resulted in two bids that have now been evaluated.

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.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

NATURE4HEALTH

The three-year Big Lottery funded project, which uses our community woodlands and green spaces to help reduce health inequalities, has now finished. Nearly 2,000 participants were been involved in the programme across the Forest. The evaluation report will be released in October.

CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

The team are working really well with a range of partners across Cheshire West to deliver the programme of activities funded by the authority. Over 1,000 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 has 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 2017/18 planting season is now complete and over 27,500 trees were planted within The Mersey Forest. Across England the Community Forests planted over 66,000 trees with 11,000 children; some 8% ahead of target. We are currently working with over 100 schools on the programme for 2018/19.

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. An international conference is being held at Bluebell Park School, Kirkby on 18 October to share learning and explore opportunities to create a network of practitioners and schools.

NATURAL PLAY

Drainage work started at Wenlock Gardens, Ellesmere Port, in late spring. Cheyney Road Park in Chester is now complete. There has been some further work on stepping-stones, the willow features, an entrance tree planted and wildflower meadows prepared for spring sowing. The next step will be to help support the set-up of a 'Friends group' to help manage the site longer term.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

URBAN GREENUP

This €10 million Horizon 2020 European funded project started in June last year. 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. In July Liverpool hosted 60 delegates for the third partner meeting.

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.

FUNDING

BIDS RECENTLY APPROVED INCLUDE:

- ESIF Whole Place Low Carbon Solutions in Liverpool City Region: £1m for green infrastructure and energy saving technology
- H2020 – CLOOP-WAY (Stage 1) “Closing the loop of urban value chains: towards a waste-free city model” led by Cartif (Spain)
- Defra Community Forest Outreach
- Colliers Moss Community engagement bids