

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## APRIL 2018

### NEWS

The National Community Forest conference was held in Birmingham on 20th March and included discussion around the urban tree canopy, initial results from the Natural Health Service research and an update on the Northern Forest. The afternoon provided an opportunity to learn more about social media and a cost-effective way to continue to raise the profile of community forestry.

The Hon Rick Colless, Natural Resources minister from Australia, together with colleagues from Defra visited the Mersey Forest to community forestry in practice. The visit included Trees For Learning and Forest School at Green Lane Special School, Warrington and the Countess of Chester Country Park.

### 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 who will be holding their AGM and quiz on 21 May.
- 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 under plant 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.

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.

## WILDLIFE

### COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

A project to cap and safeguard the excavated concrete pipeline across part of the site is underway. This will involve the importing of material to cover the line of the pipe and will create an improved access through the site.

A programme of wildlife walks is again being offered to visitors. It is hoped to include a regular clean-up event for volunteers, to keep on top of litter and fly-tipping.

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

## WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

### WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Association is now well established, having held fortnightly events during the cutting season, and the committee intend to hold several social events over the summer.

A number of other interested landowners across the Mersey Forest have been identified, including local authorities and a private landowner. At each location, there is a core group of local people who have stated their interest in forming a wood allotment group. 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 has also secured funding from the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. This has enabled a group of farmers along the River Dane corridor near Middlewich and Northwich are to work in partnership with The Mersey Forest and Reaseheath College to improve water management and restore nature habitats. The fund will provide resources to support

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.

As part of the Forest Advisory Consortium England (FACE), the Mersey Forest representing the Community Forest Trust is involved with the Plunkett Foundation as part of their “Making Local Wood Work” project: [www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands](http://www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands). A woodland management training day was delivered to arts company, Wild Rumpus

A community tree planting event was held at the Countess of Chester Country Park with over 100 local residents planting 800 native trees.

## 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, and work has already commenced in Sefton.

## 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 m<sup>3</sup> of water in the landscape – with a cost benefit ratio of 1:5. Recently, hundreds of trees have been planted in conjunction with the DEFRA Trees for Learning Programme in the Sankey catchment, with many of these trees being targeted at watercourses to address flooding.

### SLOW THE FLOW

Teams of schoolchildren planted 250 trees, next to exposed watercourses in St.Helens, to slow the flow of floodwaters in high river flows and to reduce the pollution to Blackbrook. Corpus Christi Catholic Primary school undertook the planting, with the owner of Moss House Farm kindly allowing access to his land and facilities.

The team are also supporting the business cases for Environment Agency flood risk capital projects, including the Rochdale and Littleborough scheme, Bolton’s Lostock project and New Mills in the Dark Peak.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### NATURE4HEALTH

The final year collaboration of Nature4Health is drawing to an end with over 1,750 participants having been involved in the programme to date. Data analysis and final evaluations have begun, as well as considerations as to what is next!

### CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

The team are working really well with a range of partners. Over 700 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](http://www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk/Cheshire)

## 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 is project managing the programme in this region and with our community forest partners throughout England. The planting season is now complete with over 27,500 trees planted in The Mersey Forest region since November 2017. The project has engaged thousands of children from state primary schools in hands-on tree planting sessions. Following the planting season, the team will re-visit the sites in spring and summer term with the children who planted the trees so they can learn more in curriculum-linked educational sessions and see their trees spring to life!

### FOREST SCHOOL

Smurfit Kappa Foundation are supporting the third year of Forest School work across Merseyside. Sites have been improved at special schools including Green Lane School and Bluebell Park, with Woolston Brook starting next week. A Forest School Level 3 Leader course was held in St. Helens in March with 12 new leaders. Christ the King School, Liverpool have requested a teachers training session to enable them to expand their provision for outdoor learning.

### 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. During the March visit to

Slovenia the team were asked to run another Forest School training day with 25 delegates from Slovenia and Austria.

## NATURAL PLAY

Drainage work will start 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 last 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.

A number of interventions to deliver 'Nature Based Solutions' have been identified across the city green walls and sustainable urban drainage systems. A year-long baseline environmental monitoring programme will commence in September this year, followed by a two-year post intervention monitoring period. Between 9-14 July Liverpool will be hosting 60 delegates for the third partner meeting.

### CHESHIRE EAST GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The team has been commissioned by Cheshire East Council to produce a green infrastructure plan for the borough.

### ST HELENS PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

The team has recently completed a green infrastructure assessment of St Helens' parks and green spaces, which found, amongst other things, that the benefits of council-owned green space include £135m Gross Value Added, £243m of land and property value, and £222m of other economic value.

## FUNDING

### BIDS RECENTLY APPROVED INCLUDE:

- Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund for the Lower Dane Farmers' Group. A three year programme of support, training and events designed to engage farmers in the area

with opportunities to improve the natural environment and make their businesses more efficient. Facilitation will be provided in partnership with Reaseheath College (£60k).

- Awards for All - Connecting local people to their Community Forest. To support activities linked to the Forest Charter and the development of the Northern Forest (10k).

Consultancy:

- Environment Agency natural flood management preliminary study for the Rochdale and Littleborough capital scheme
- Woodland Trust feasibility study for a Smithills natural flood management scheme – forming part of the wider Northern Forest initiative, with Smithills being a pilot site with 150,000 trees being planted.