

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

JANUARY 2018

NEWS

At a national level, the Team is coordinating input from England's Community Forests into a Business Case for innovative funding for Community Forests.

The Northern Forest was announced by the Prime Minister on 6 January. The Mersey Forest team has been working with colleagues from Woodland Trust and the other Community Forests in the north of England over the past 12 months to pull together the plan for this exciting project. Tom Butlin undertook all the data analysis and mapping, which led into the evidence document. The Northern Forest builds on the work of the Mersey Forest Partnership to date and will support future delivery. The announcement of new funds and focus will help the Partnership to achieve the Mersey Forest Plan.

The long awaited Defra 25 Year Plan for the Environment was announced on 11 January. This included references to the Northern Forest, the role of the Community Forests in delivery of the strategy, as well as featuring the work of The Mersey Forest Partnership as a case study to illustrate the goal of increasing green infrastructure in urban areas.

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

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 with funding bids and to develop its social media.
- **Friends of Owley Wood**
- **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 Christopher's 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 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.

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

Following a final phase of works to improve signage and improve footpath surfaces, a new programme of wildlife walks is planned for 2018. 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 six months, running each Sunday morning and attracting 20+ volunteers and 45+ junior runners.

WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Association has become established and following training, are now holding fortnightly cutting events with good turnout from members. A successful Community Woodlands event was held in November for 60 people. This raised the profile of wood allotments and included a visit to Spud Wood during the afternoon to see an established group.

As the programme is rolled out across The Mersey Forest, several prospective wood allotment sites are now being assessed for feasibility. Meanwhile, interest from the public in joining an allotment group is increasing, with enquires coming in via www.woodallotments.com.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT

Bids for the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF) were submitted in November. The Lower Dane Group application was successful and we are awaiting news on the other bids for the Sankey catchment and Sefton Coast. 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.

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 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 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 now complete. The result can be explored at <http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/things-to-do/walks-bike-rides-and-more/>.

Alongside walking, cycling, horse riding, woodland and events, the new website section features geocaching, an outdoor activity in which cachers use a GPS-enabled device to find a 'treasure' hidden by other participants.

The project has also made all sections of the main website responsive, so that it works better on mobile phones and tablets.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

NATURE4HEALTH

The final year collaboration of Nature4Health is underway with over 1,500 participants already having been involved in the programme.

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 was made in November 2017. An exciting new rolling programme of activities in Cheshire West was launched on 8 January: <http://naturalhealthservice.org.uk/wordpress/cheshires-natural-health-service/>

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 is project managing the programme in this region and with our community forest partners throughout England. The planting season is now well underway with over 14,700 trees planted in The Mersey Forest region since November and around 9,000 more trees to be planted before March 2018. The project has engaged hundreds of children from state primary schools in hands-on tree planting sessions. Following the planting season, the team will re-visit the sites 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 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. A successful conference was held with partners in November based at Risley Moss, Bluebell School in Knowsley and Green Lane School in Warrington.

NATURAL PLAY

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 was held in October half term.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

URBAN GREENUP

This €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. 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.

WILMSLOW GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

The team has been working with Wilmslow Town Council and Transition Wilmslow to produce a green infrastructure assessment for the area, to inform the Neighbourhood Plan. This will hopefully be the first of many such assessments in the context of Neighbourhood Planning.

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).
- ESIF Low Carbon (Cheshire & Warrington) – sister proposal to LCR project
- H2020 – nature based solutions with a focus on health led by Cartif (Spain)