

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## JULY 2020

### NEWS

Since 16 March the Mersey Forest Offices have been closed and like many other organisations, the Team has been working from home. As lockdown has started to be lifted site visits have resumed (following guidelines), although all meetings continue to be held remotely.

### EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

#### SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

Since March 2020, all the Friends Groups have had to come to a stop, however it is hoped that over the summer, some volunteering activities can resume.

#### COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

Completion of the Phase 2 pipeline remediation project was delayed by the wet winter, but is now subject to a planning application. This is being progressed, but timescales are uncertain and will depend on the response of the Planning Authority and suitable conditions to carry out the remaining works. We have received positive feedback from site users in relation to the Phase 1 works. Once completed, the work will open up a circular route around the site for visitors and form a link to St. Helens Junction station. This was identified as an infrastructure need in the Bold Park Area Action Plan.

Covid 19 restrictions have limited any formal uses of the site; we hoped to play host to a group from the National Forum for Biological Recording in May – this has now been postponed until October. Warrington Running Club's trail-race series has also been a casualty of the lockdown.

#### GRIFFIN WOOD

Following improved access with as a result of our partnership with Life for a Life, Griffin Wood has been very well used over the past few months. Unfortunately there was a significant amount of vandalism in the woodlands at the end of April, and three bridges were destroyed. This meant that access to the mature woodland (via the bridges) had to be restricted until repairs could be carried out.

However, we have been overwhelmed with messages of support from walkers and local residents who were upset at the vandalism. Many supported through practical actions, such as

litter picking and being our eyes and ears on the ground. One resident made a substantial financial donation to cover the cost of the repairs to one of the bridges and we look forward to a grand opening next month.

## WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

### WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The existing four wood allotment projects are progressing well at Spud Wood, Sefton, Northwich Woodlands and Weaverham, with demand exceeding places available. As a result, the team is looking to develop new Wood Allotment groups with several other interested landowners across the Forest, including at Ince and in Liverpool.

### NORTHERN FOREST

Planting this 19/20 season has delivered a wide and varied programme focusing on parks Friends groups, Country Parks, farm sites, new community woodland sites, providing opportunities for volunteering and schools planting events.

Over 36,000 trees were planted, exceeding the target given to Mersey Forest. A healthy pipeline of schemes will carry this programme strongly into the coming years of the programme as complimentary funding is sought.

On the back of recently declared Climate Emergencies there is an upsurge of interest from members of the public and partner organisations in tree planting. Interest in volunteering and a renewed interest in health and wellbeing is driving suggestions for new sites across the forest area including hedging, standard trees and small copses.

## WATER MANAGEMENT

### NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

The team have supported the Environment Agency backed natural flood management projects in Smithills, Bolton and Rochdale where around 40 run-off attenuation features have been installed to alleviate flood risk above communities that are at risk. In Smithills, works are about to go to tender for a cluster of wetland measures at 2 farms and one moorland site. In Rochdale, works are due to commence on slow the flow. Supporting Rochdale BC has enabled engagement with the Woodland Trust to occur and a pipeline scheme of 2.4 ha of woodland to be planted on Rochdale BC land, at Summit. At Fir Tree Farm in St. Helens, funding is being secured to install a sluice on a bund, to enable more dynamic control of flood-flows by a farmer above a community at flood risk. Finally, the schemes in New Mills and Smithills are set to be

print published in the US Army Corps of Engineers, Engineering with Nature Atlas which demonstrates nature based solutions schemes around the world.

## **WARMINGHAM NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT**

Emerging from its work with farmers in the Lower Dane area, a project to install 13 leaky woody dams at a member's farm in Warmingham has now been completed. The work was funded by a Water Environment Grant from the Environment Agency and will be a demonstration project for the network, with water quality monitoring undertaken to evaluate its impact. The project was presented in a workshop with the chair of the Environment Agency, which included a video interview with the farmer. Through funding under the Northern Forest, over 1,500 diverse trees were planted across the farmland.

Other sites are now emerging in the lower Dane providing opportunities for NFM and tree planting.

## **NATURAL COURSE**

The team has continued work on a three-year LIFE+ project which focuses on the use of Urban Catchment Forestry to deliver integrated water management solutions and multiple ecosystem services in urban areas. A series of case studies are now set to be loaded onto the Natural Course website, including for Crompton Moor, Smithills, Rochdale and New Mills.

## **NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE**

Over the last seven years the Mersey Forest team has been developing Natural Health Service. Close working with both Liverpool universities continues to provide independent and robust assessment of the impacts of the work, enabling improvements and adding to the evidence base to demonstrate efficacy of this approach.

## **NATURE4HEALTH**

Nature4Health is a successful project funded by The National Lottery's Community Fund to tackle health inequalities and reduce social isolation in targeted communities across The Mersey Forest. The first programme (2014–2017) provided health-promoting, enjoyable group activities in a green, therapeutic environment for just under 2,000 participants. The current programme started in June 2019 and lasts for two years. As a result of Covid-19, all programmes came to a halt in March, however virtual support was maintained at St. Margaret's, Toxteth and the group has been very eager to resume in a safe and distanced manner. As lockdown is eased, more activities are planned to start in the coming weeks.

## **CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE**

The team continues to work with a range of partners across Cheshire West to deliver the programme of activities funded by the authority's health inequalities funding. Over 3,000 participants have been involved undertaking activities including walks, mindfulness, horticulture therapy, healthy conservation and forest school. As a result of Covid-19, all programmes in Cheshire came to a halt in March, however participants have been supported throughout. The Gardening for All project in Ellesmere Port has just started up again whilst operating slightly differently from before.

## **COMMUNITY FOREST AND WOODLAND OUTREACH**

Thrive in the Forest (previously named Forest Schools in the Mersey Forest) is a three-year DEFRA and Department of Education funded project managed by Natural England which will see the team work with 28 schools across the Forest to deliver school grounds improvement, a programme of Forest Schools and CPD opportunities for teachers. In Year One the Forest recruited and worked with 12 of these schools and we will be recruiting a further 12 in the 20/21 academic year. The project will align with the Green Recovery across the Mersey Forest area. Specifically, we have increased the scope of the project to facilitate a broader offer of CPD opportunities for teachers, through LJMU to include outdoor learning modules which focus on both curriculum delivery and increasing well-being. We have restructured the delivery model to adapt to potential delivery risks in the coming year. This means our programme on offer to schools will offer firstly schools grounds development, secondly CPD and thirdly observed Forest School sessions

## **TREES FOR LEARNING**

The Mersey Forest team has project managed a £350K four-year national programme of tree planting projects with primary schools across the Community Forests. In total over 164,000 trees were planted across the country. Our fourth year of planting took place in The Mersey Forest where 5,577 trees were planted with 38 schools. Follow up education sessions will continue to summer 2020. An education pack produced for the project to encourage further outdoor learning for school staff. This has also been made available online and has been downloaded over 4,000 times. We are currently developing Trees For Learning 2, where we hope to broaden our offer to include Secondary and SEN schools, and offer further enhanced follow up education sessions.

## **GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING**

### **URBAN GREENUP**

This five-year €10 million Horizon 2020 European funded project started in June 2017. The Mersey Forest team 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 installed across the city, including 150 large street trees along the Strand with sustainable urban drainage systems, a pollinator roof at the Royal Court Theatre, a 65m green wall at St John's Shopping Centre and a number of appearances of the PopUP Forest. The year-long baseline environmental monitoring has concluded and results are being analysed. The environmental monitoring will continue until the end of the programme in 2022.

### **WHOLE PLACE LOW CARBON SOLUTIONS (ESIF)**

Despite the restrictions in place due to COVID-19, the project has made good progress, with contractors starting on site at Northbank West and Tower Road. The delayed start means that although the works should be completed before calendar year end, the need to process claims and evidence expenditure means the project completion date will probably need to be extended. It is hoped that the street tree planting at Stafford Street in Liverpool will commence soon, whilst procurement of low energy lighting and smart energy management system, including the Bluecoat is progressing.

### **URBAN TREE CHALLENGE FUND**

Season 1 of the Urban Trees in The Mersey Forest project saw around 20% of the total number of trees successfully planted across Merseyside. However, exceptionally dry weather immediately after the planting season will almost certainly mean that some trees will need to be replaced. A further 4,400 trees will be planted next season as part of the project, followed by five years maintenance and monitoring.